



# Teaching Listening & Speaking

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# The Importance of Listening

- Listening is a critical receptive skill (“input”) that typically precedes productive ability (“output”)
  - Some methodologies – such as Total Physical Response – are comprehension based approaches
- In the language classroom and outside the class students engage in more listening than speaking
  - Providing students with comprehensible input is an important element of language teaching

# Considerations in Teaching Listening

- What are listeners doing when they listen?
- What factors affect good listening?
- What are characteristics of “real-life” listening?
- What are the many things listeners listen for?
- What are some principles for designing listening techniques?
- How can listening techniques be interactive?
- What are some common techniques for teaching listening?

# Listening is a Complex, Interactive Skill

- Processes in listening comprehension
  - Raw speech is processed into short-term memory
  - Type of speech event is determined/assigned (conversation, lecture, TV ad, etc.)
  - Assessment of speaker's objective (inform, persuade, request, etc.)
  - Background information (schema) applied to aid in comprehension
  - Literal meaning assigned to message

# Listening is a Complex, Interactive Skill

- Processes in listening comprehension
  - Intended meaning assigned to message; different from literal message
  - Determination to commit information to short-term or long-term memory
  - Original words, phrases, and sentences are (largely) “pruned” and the message concept is retained.
- Listening is an interactive process and learners may have difficulty at any of these steps

# What makes listening difficult?

- Clustering
  - Spoken language is “chunked” into phrases and clauses
- Redundancy
  - Rephrasing, repetition, elaborations are helpful (extra information, extra time) but make “tracking” speech difficult
- Reduced forms
  - Phonological (“Jeet?”), morphological (“I’ll”), syntactic (“Finish yet?”)

# What makes listening difficult?

- Performance variables
  - Hesitations, false starts, pauses, corrections, ungrammatical forms
- Colloquial language
  - Idioms, slang, reduced forms, shared cultural knowledge
- Rate of delivery
  - Speed of stream of speech; little opportunity to “re-listen”

# What makes listening difficult?

- Stress, rhythm, and intonation
  - Prosodic features of English cause difficulty
- Interaction
  - Rules of conversation, negotiation, turn-taking, topic nomination and maintenance; two-way, interactive skill

# Types of listening skills

- Micro-skills
  - Sentence level
    - Retain chunks of language in short-term memory
    - Discriminate among the sounds of English
    - Recognize stress and intonation patterns
    - Recognize grammatical word classes
    - Process at different rates of delivery
    - Distinguish word boundaries
    - Recognize word order patterns

# Types of listening skills

- Macro-skills
  - Discourse level
    - Recognize cohesion devices
    - Recognize communicative functions
    - Distinguish main and supporting ideas, new and understood information
    - Distinguish literal and implied meanings
    - Understand nonverbal communication signals
    - Use listening strategies: guessing from context, asking for help, signaling (lack of) comprehension

# Types of classroom listening skills

- Reactive (listen and repeat)
- Intensive (listen for specific sounds, discourse markers, intonation patterns, etc.)
- Responsive (listen and respond – briefly)
- Selective (listen for particular items in a longer stretch of discourse)
- Extensive (listen for global comprehension)
- Interactive (authentic communication; listening as part of discussion, conversation, debate, etc.)

# Principles for teaching listening

- Integrate listening practice into the course
  - Don't assume it “just happens”
- Appeal to students' intrinsic motivation
  - Include local culture and preexisting schema
- Use authentic language and contexts
  - Highlight relevance to real-life needs
- Consider how students will respond
  - Listening cannot be seen; infer comprehension
- Teach listening strategies
- Include both bottom-up AND top-down listening

# Principles for teaching listening

- Teach listening strategies
  - Train students in skills they need to develop their listening abilities
    - Listening for key words
    - Noting non-verbal elements
    - Predicting speaker's purpose
    - Listening for general ideas
- Include both bottom-up (sounds to words to grammar) and top-down (prior knowledge and global expectations) listening

# Current issues in teaching oral skills

- Conversational discourse
  - Attention to conversation rules, sociolinguistic appropriateness, speech styles, routines, etc.
- Teaching pronunciation
  - How to teach, yet understanding that accents will remain
- Accuracy and fluency
  - How to address these two elements of language usage and language use

# Current issues in teaching oral skills

- Affective factors
  - Creating a climate that encourages students to speak and to accept imperfections as part of the process
- Interaction effect
  - Speaking is a collaborative activity which students must learn to negotiate
- Questions about intelligibility
  - Students must learn to be intelligible, not native speakers

# What makes speaking difficult?

The same elements that make listening difficult:

- Clustering
- Redundancy
- Reduced forms
- Performance variables
- Colloquial language
- Rate of delivery
- Stress, rhythm, and intonation
- Interaction

# Types of classroom performance

- Imitative
  - Repetition drills to practice specific features
- Responsive
  - Short replies to teacher or peer questions
- Transactional (dialogue)
  - Language which conveys or exchanges information
- Interpersonal (dialogue)
  - Social interactions
- Extensive
  - Monologues given for oral reports, summaries, speeches

# Principles for Teaching Speaking

- Focus on fluency and accuracy (depending on lesson/activity objective)
- Use intrinsically motivating techniques based on student goals and interests
- Use authentic language in meaningful contexts
- Provide appropriate feedback and correction
- Optimize the natural link between listening and speaking
- Give students the opportunity to initiate oral communication
- Develop speaking strategies

# Common Speaking Strategies

- Asking for clarification (“I’m sorry, I don’t understand”)
- Asking someone to repeat something (“Could you say that again?”)
- Using fillers (“Well,” “Um,” “I mean”)
- Using conversation maintenance cues (“uh-huh,” “right,” “yeah,” “okay”)
- Getting someone’s attention (“Excuse me”)
- Using paraphrases in place of difficult structures
- Appealing for assistance from conversation partner (“How do you say...?”)
- Using formulaic expressions (“How much is this?” “Where is the \_\_\_\_\_?”)
- Using nonverbal expressions

# Features of conversation to teach

- Transactional and interactional purposes
- Short and long turns in conversation
- Taking, holding, and relinquishing a turn
- Opening and closing a conversation
- Casual, neutral, and formal styles of speaking
- Repairing communication breakdown and comprehension problems
- Conversational fillers and small talk
- Conversational routines

# Sample activities for teaching conversation

- Interviews
- Guessing games
- Jigsaw tasks
- Ranking exercises
- Discussions
- Values clarification
- Problem-solving activities
- Role plays
- Simulations
- Picture story-telling

# Should we teach pronunciation?

- Previous behavioral approaches emphasized mastery of individual sounds
- Other approaches “just let it happen”
- Today, balance between accuracy and fluency
- Pronunciation in discourse view: articulation of words and phrases in stream of speech, with attention paid to rhythm and intonation
- Goal is clear, comprehensible pronunciation (rather than accent-free) within a communicative, interactive view of speaking

# Factors that affect pronunciation

- Native language
  - L1 and L2 sound system variations
- Age
  - Generally, pre-puberty children have an advantage, yet all students can learn to be comprehensible
- Innate phonetic ability
  - Individual variations, but all can learn with practice
- Identity and language ego
  - Positive attitude toward English and willingness to go through the learning process
- Motivation/concern for good pronunciation
  - Strong factor in predicting success

# When and how to correct errors

- Global vs. local errors
- Basic treatment options
  - To treat or to ignore
  - To treat immediately or to delay
  - To transfer treatment [to, say, other learners] or not
  - To transfer to another individual, a subgroup, or the whole class
- Treatment features
  - Fact of error indicated; location indicated
  - Opportunity for new attempt given
  - Model provided
  - Error type indicated
  - Remedy indicated
  - Improvement indicated; praise indicated

## **Break-out Activity**

With a partner/group, read the situations and write your predictions about what will happen. Briefly discuss the main purpose of this activity and what learning strategies does it involve?